John Pierce
from his friend,
Rev. Abiel Abbot.

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Mr. FRENCH's SERMON AT THE ORDINATION OF THE Rev. ABIEL ABBOT.

A SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE

ORDINATION

OF THE

REV. ABIEL ABBOT,

TO THE

PASTORAL CARE

OF THE

FIRST CHURCH AND SOCIETY

IN *HAVERHILL*,

June 3d, 1795.

BY JONATHAN FRENCH, A. M.

PASTOR OF THE

SOUTH CHURCH IN ANDOVER.

TOGETHER WITH THE

CHARGE,

BY THE REV. MR. SYMMES, OF ANDOVER.

AND THE

RIGHT HAND OF FELLOWSHIP,

BY THE REV. MR. MERRILL, OF PLAISTOW.

HAVERHILL,

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An Ordination Sermon.

2 CORINTHIANS, II, 17.

For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God; but as of ſincerity, but as of God, in the ſight of God ſpeak we in Chriſt.

THESE words were ſpoken by the Apoſtle Paul, under a ſolemn and awful ſenſe of the greatneſs and importance of the work of the Miniſtry, and the neceſſity of ſincerity and fidelity in the diſcharge of the duties of that ſacred office. He gives exalted praiſe to GOD, that he ſhould be counted worthy of the ſacred truſt, and for the ſucceſs which had attended his labors. He bleſſes GOD for the triumphant honors which were put upon him and the other Apoſtles in Chriſt, in the manifeſtation of his ſaving knowledge to the ſouls of men in every place, where they had been called to miniſter. In alluſion, probably, to the fragrant odours, which perfumed the ſacrifices offered among the ancients, in their triumphal rejoicings over their enemies, the Apoſtles accounted themſelves unto GOD a ſweet ſavour of Chriſt in them that are ſaved, and in them that periſh. As rich perfumes

ſumes to ſome conſtitutions are overpowering and deſtructive, ſo to them who will not believe and obey it, the rich and infinitely precious ſavour of the goſpel, is efficacious only in hardening the heart, and fitting them for indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguiſh, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God: But upon them who receive it, the bleſſed goſpel ſheds its ſweet odours, the ſoul reviving fragrance of eternal life. With a mind deeply impreſſed with a ſenſe of the greatneſs of the work, and the different ſucceſs, and ſolemn conſequences which attend the preaching of the goſpel, as if almoſt ready to ſink under the weight, the Apoſtle exclaims, "Who is ſufficient for theſe things?" As if he had ſaid, "How great is the work to which I am called? Who is able to ſuſtain the burdens and perform the labors of the ſacred office, and preach the word as it ought to be preached! But as God knows our infirmities, and our ſincerity; and as we enter upon the buſineſs in his fear, and in his ſtrength, we truſt to his power and bleſſing for ſupport and ſucceſs;" For we are not as many who corrupt the word of God; but as of ſincerity, but as of God, in the ſight of God ſpeak we in Chriſt.

By the word of God we underſtand the ſacred volumes of the old and new Teſtaments, which were revealed to holy men of old, who ſpake not by the will of man, but as they were moved by the holy Ghoſt. This revelation is confirmed by miracles, and by propheſies and their accompliſhment, with all thoſe other marks and evidences, which a revelation can admit. The holy Scriptures, founded upon the truth of God, have withſtood all the attacks of infidels, and the ignorant and vain pretenders to reaſon and common ſenſe in every period of the world. The ſacred ſcriptures have been embraced by the moſt learned,

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the moſt pious and judicious men, as the pure and holy word of God. This word contains a ſyſtem of religion, which, in point of doctrine and morality, ſtands unrivalled by any ſyſtem which ever appeared in our world. Chriſtianity as the truth of God, and for its purity and excellence, demands the belief and eſteem of all mankind. Thy word, ſaith the Pſalmiſt, is very pure; therefore thy ſervant loveth it. Conſidering the Scriptures then as the pure and holy word of God, theſe two things will be attempted from the text.

I. To ſhow that it ought to be the ſerious concern of every faithful Miniſter of Chriſt not to corrupt the word of God. But,

II. As of ſincerity, as of God, and as in the ſight of God, to ſpeak the word in Chriſt.

I. It ought to be the ſerious concern of every faithful Miniſter of Chriſt, not to corrupt the word of God.

The Greek word, which is here tranſlated *corrupt*, very ſignificantly alludes to ſelling of articles, which are adulterated for the ſake of gain; or it means deceitful, fraudulent dealing. The Apoſtle applies the phraſe to thoſe ignorant and artful teachers who deal in deceit and hypocriſy, corrupting the word for the ſake of gain. Being men of corrupt minds, and a defiled conſcience, from ſelfiſh, wicked views, they adulterate the word of God, and impoſe error inſtead of truth upon mankind. The Apoſtle deſcribes them as men of corrupt minds, deſtitute of the truth, and reprobate concerning the faith. As there always have been, ſo it may be expected there always will be

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ſome in every age of the Church, who being deſtitute of a pure heart, of a good conſcience, and faith unfeigned, ſwerve from the truth, and turn aſide to error. Hence, it may be expected there will always be ſome who will corrupt the word of GOD.

THIS may be done in many ways. We may take notice of a few of the numberleſs inſtances in which the word of GOD may be corrupted.

THIS may be done by ſetting aſide, as of no weight or conſequence, ſome of the moſt important and eſſential doctrines of chriſtianity. Some, who profeſs to be wiſe and learned teachers of the goſpel of Chriſt, deny the doctrine of human depravity; the plan of redemption through the rich mercy and free grace of GOD, and the atonement of Chriſt—They deny that the divine Saviour was more than a mere man—and diſcard many other doctrines eſſentially connected with theſe.—Strike theſe out of the ſyſtem of our religion, and what a ſcheme of chriſtianity ſhould we have? Whether ſuch teachers are not corrupters of the word of GOD, judge ye.

THE word of GOD may alſo be corrupted by adding the doctrines and inventions of men, and palming them upon mankind as divine truths. To deal in ſuch adulterations is to put a cheat upon the world, and to endanger the ſouls of men. Such teachers have reaſon to fear the plagues and judgments denounced againſt thoſe who add to, or diminiſh from, the propheſy of GOD. Thus ſaith the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the firſt and the laſt. I teſtify unto every man that heareth the words of the propheſy of this book, if any man ſhall add unto theſe things, GOD ſhall add unto him the plagues that

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are written in this book: And if any man ſhall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God ſhall take away his part out of the book of life.

Ignorant and unguarded teachers, by wrong conſtructions and miſrepreſentations, may corrupt the word of God. By this mean truth may be darkened by words without knowledge; and error be dreſſed up in a falſe garb, and paſſed for truth. This may lead the mind aſtray, and endanger the comfort and ſalvation of ſouls. To prevent evils of ſuch magnitude, the preacher in all his ſtudies and reſearches after truth, would do well carefully and ſcrupulouſly, to examine into the ſenſe of the ſacred writer in every paſſage which he attempts to explain to others. He ought to be well ſatisfied of the deſign, and main object the writer had in view. He ought duly to attend to the connexions of the paſſage, and compare it with others which may throw light upon it. The perſon who writes, the time, the circumſtances, and occaſion of what he ſays, ſhould all be taken into conſideration. The ſuppoſed meaning with its conſequences ought, finally, to be compared with the common analogy of faith, and with the known and acknowledged attributes of Deity. Such attention and mode of inquiry may guard the ſenſible and honeſt preacher from eſſentially corrupting the word of God.

The word of God may alſo be corrupted by withholding ſome eſſential truth, or by making the inſpired writers ſpeak more than they ever intended. As in the caſe of evidence, the truth may be greatly injured by ſtraining ſome facts above their real ſimplicity, and by withholding ſome eſſential truths, which were neceſſary to the right underſtanding of others;

or by making the words mean more than was intended, and more than the truth will bear. Senſible of this, and knowing that no ſcripture is of private interpretation, but that every revealed ſubject, as times and circumſtances may require, may be treated of; and knowing alſo, that to withhold the truth might endanger ſouls, the Apoſtle Paul did not ſhun to declare the whole counſel of GOD; and could call his hearers to witneſs that he was pure from the blood of all men.

THE word of GOD may alſo be corrupted by ſpeaking ſmooth things, flattering the vanity, and quieting the minds of men in ſin with the hope of peace, while to the wicked there is no peace. That liberality of ſentiment, and ſuperficial mode of preaching, which make no diſtinction between good and bad principles, and conſider religious opinions as of little or no conſequence, may do as much injury to the cauſe of Chriſt, as infidelity itſelf. If any then, through laxity of ſentiment, from an accommodating diſpoſition, through fear of man, or leſt they ſhould hurt the feelings of ſome who hear them, ſhould ſlightly paſs over the great doctrines of the evil of ſin, the neceſſity of renewing and ſanctifying grace, the certainty of a day of judgment, and a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, &c. might they not be juſtly deemed corrupters of the word of GOD? May not ſuch preachers juſtly fear the wo denounced againſt thoſe who propheſy ſmooth things, and heal the hurt of the ſoul ſlightly, and are not valiant for the truth?

To leſſen the force of the weighty motives of the goſpel, which apply to the fears and conſciences of ſinners; which were deſigned and adapted to awe them from ſin, and to awaken in them a ſerious concern for their immortal intereſts, is to corrupt the word

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of God. Such preachers afford but a feeble aid, if any at all, to the cauſe of virtue, and the religion of Jeſus. It argues an indifference to the moſt weighty concerns, and the want of that caution and ſerioufneſs which are neceſſary to guard them againſt corrupting the word of God.

The word of God may alſo be greatly corrupted by miſrepreſenting the Divine character.

Almost every error which has crept into theology, has been founded upon wrong notions, and miſrepreſentations of God. Some repreſent him as an arbitrary deſpotic Being, determining the final end and eternal ſtate of mankind, by a mere act of ſovereign, abſolute decree, without regard either to the moral fitneſs of things, or to the good, or the bad character of his ſubjects. Some would repreſent him as the immediate creator of every volition, whether good or evil, in ſuch a manner as virtually, though perhaps not intentionally, to exclude all other agency but that of the Deity from the Univerſe. Others, to avoid ſuch erroneous poſitions, and to ſhun a train of fatal conſequences which unavoidably follow, run into the contrary extreme, and would make man, as to the origin of his volitions and moral actions, independent of God. From theſe extremes, with their connexions and conſequences, an almoſt indeſcribable ſource of error and corruption of the word may enſue.

Others would repreſent the Deity as above taking notice of the tranſactions of men. And ſuppoſing him to be regardleſs of his threatenings, awful deluſion, they would quiet the conſciences of ſinners with the hope, that, let them live as they will here, they will be happy hereafter. How careful ſhould the preacher

preacher be to form right conceptions of God himſelf, leſt he corrupt the word, and lead others into fatal error.

This leads me to mention another thing which has a great tendency to corrupt the word. I mean the miſuſe and abuſe of words. It ought to be the ſerious concern of a preacher, not only to have clear and diſtinct ideas of important truths himſelf, but to deliver them in terms as free as poſſible from ambiguity. It ought to be his care, not only to expreſs himſelf ſo that he may be underſtood right; but, if poſſible, ſo as not to be underſtood wrong. We know a difficulty may attend this matter from the nature and imperfection of language. But care ought to be taken not to increaſe the difficulty through ignorance and inattention, or by an affected ſingularity in the uſe of words. By uſing words in a different ſenſe from that in which they are generally uſed and underſtood, the preacher may convey a meaning to others as wide from his own, as it may be far from the truth. An unguarded, though perhaps pious preacher, whoſe own mind may be impreſſed with a ſenſe of the holineſs and juſtice of God; and may view ſin as the accurſed thing, which the Lord in his ſoul hateth; yet, may ſpeak of the divine efficiency in the production of all moral evil in ſuch a manner, as to convey to the minds of his hearers the idea, awful to think, that God is the author of ſin in ſuch a ſenſe as to exclude all blame from the ſinner. This ſentiment, at the ſame time, may be as abhorrent to the preacher himſelf as to any who hear him. But whatever his own meaning and intentions may be, to them who hear him, he is a corrupter of the word of God. Would not our young ſtudents in divinity, and candidates for the Miniſtry, as well as thoſe who are now Miniſters of the goſpel, do well to pay a

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ſtrict and ſerious attention to the nature and uſe of words in their compoſitions? Permit me to recommend to all our young preachers, and ſtudents in divinity, an attentive peruſal of the great Mr. LOCKE upon the imperfection of language, the abuſe of words, and their remedies.

THE word of GOD may alſo be corrupted, and great errors produced and encouraged, by ſetting aſide the moſt clear and certain evidence of moral agency of right and wrong, and the blame or the praiſe of moral actions, that can poſſibly apply to the human mind. I mean that of conſciouſneſs. By ſetting aſide this, by adopting in its ſtead many vague and fallacious deductions, drawn from uncertain and diſputable principles, the mind may become bewildered in a maze of abſtruſe and obſcure, unedifying, and perhaps dangerous ſpeculations. It muſt be the duty then of every honeſt preacher, and inquirer after truth, to be careful not to reject the higheſt and cleareſt evidence, for thoſe which are more obſcure and leſs certain; leſt he become a corrupter of the word of GOD.

THE word of GOD may alſo be corrupted by ſetting up human creeds and confeſſions, inſtead of the ſacred ſcriptures, as the ſtandard of chriſtian faith. Such creeds we muſt ſuppoſe to be conceived either in words of ſcripture, or in words which convey the preciſe ideas of ſcripture, or in words which ſhall convey the compiler's ſenſe of ſcripture. If the firſt method be adopted, and ſuch a creed ſhould be expreſſed in the very words of ſcripture; it would in that caſe contain no more than a mere abſtract of the word, which would be unneceſſary. But if the ſecond method be adopted, and ſuch a creed ſhould be expreſſed in words only which convey the preciſe idea of the ſcriptures;

ſuch a creed would amount to the ſame thing as the ſcriptures themſelves expreſſed in other words. While we have the ſcriptures in our own hands, ſuch creeds cannot be neceſſary. But if the third method be embraced, and a creed ſhould be compoſed, not in ſcripture language, but in words which ſhall convey the ſenſe of the ſcriptures, as the compilers underſtand them; then, whoever ſhall adopt this creed will make not the ſcriptures themſelves, but the compilers explanation of them the ſtandard of faith. Such a method might be very hazardous. For what is this but to ſhift the ſtandard of faith from the firm baſis of ſcriprure, and to place it upon the fallible explanations of fallible men? The ſcriptures themſelves are the only ſtandard of faith, and ſure guide to eternal life. The faithful miniſters of Chriſt will not impoſe any human creeds upon their people, as ſtandards of faith, inſtead of the ſacred ſcriptures. Neither will they claim any dominion over the faith, or the conſciences of their hearers. Not that we have dominion over your faith, ſaith the Apoſtle, but are helpers of your joy.

WHAT has been ſaid is not, however, intended to ſuggeſt the leaſt impropriety in a candidate's exhibiting a confeſſion of his faith to thoſe who may be called to induct him into the ſacred office. We are ſolemnly charged before GOD and his elect Angels, to lay hands ſuddenly on no man: But to commit the things we have received to faithful men, who ſhall be able to teach others alſo. An ordaining council have therefore an undoubted right to the knowledge of the ſentiments of the candidate, upon all the great and eſſential doctrines of chriſtianity, either by written or oral confeſſion, in the moſt explicit and unequi-

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vocal terms.* Neither is it intended, by any thing that has been said, to ſuggeſt the leaſt impropriety of examining into the belief and character of perſons to be admitted into fellowſhip and communion of a covenanted church. Otherwiſe, perſons might be admitted, whoſe only views are to overturn the very foundations of chriſtianity.

NEITHER

* *The author cannot conceive the leaſt inconſiſtency in decrying human creeds and confeſſions, as ſtandards of chriſtian faith inſtead of the bible; and at the ſame time requiring of a candidate for ordination the moſt explicit and unequivocal declaration of his ſentiments, upon what a counſel ſhall judge to be the leading, and eſſential doctrines of chriſtianity. In doing this, they do but exerciſe that right which they readily grant to the candidate; the right of judging for themſelves. The ordination of a goſpel miniſter is one of the moſt ſolemn and important tranſactions that ever called the attention of a Preſbytery. This is an affair in which they are called to act for themſelves; and are accountable to the great head of the Church for what they do. They muſt anſwer it to him, if they admit an unworthy character into that office; or if they exclude a good one from it. Notwithſtanding, therefore, a council may not be warranted in requiring a candidate to ſubſcribe to the articles of their belief; they undoubtedly have a right to inquire into his, ſo far as to enable them to act underſtandingly and conſcientiouſly in a matter of ſuch moment. Some ſuppoſe, if a candidate has been previouſly approbated to preach, by ſome regular aſſociation, that an ordaining council have no right to examine him at all. If a council were ſure the candidate had been duly examined; and that the principles of the examiners quadrated with their own; and that the candidate had not altered his ſentiments ſince his approbation; in that caſe, any farther examination would be unneceſſary. But how are they to know all this? They do not know how he was examined, or whether his ſentiments in their view were right when he was approbated. But if they were, as he may have altered them ſince, an ordaining council have a right to ſee with their own eyes; to hear with their own ears; and to judge for themſelves. And how gentlemen, profeſſing catholiciſm and liberality of ſentiment, can conſiſtently deny this, it is hard to conceive. All imaginable tenderneſs, however, ought to be uſed in the examination of a candidate; and every allowance ought to be made for youth and inexperience. And where there is apparent evidence of an honeſt and good mind, none but the moſt unfeeling heart, would wiſh to perplex, or entangle a young gentleman with knotty and difficult queſtions, in ſuch a feeling ſituation*

NEITHER would I ſuggeſt any thing againſt our churches binding themſelves by covenant to worſhip and walk together according to the rules of the Goſpel; and of requiring others, who would join with them, to conform to the ſame. For I confeſs, I do not ſee how a church can well be held together in goſpel order, without a covenant of ſome form or other.

THUS, we have hinted at a few of the numerous ways, in which the word of GOD may be corrupted. From all which we ſee how much it ought to be the ſerious concern of every faithful Miniſter of Chriſt, not to corrupt the word of GOD.

BUT,

II. As of ſincerity, as of GOD, and, as in the ſight of GOD, to ſpeak the word in Chriſt.

GODLY ſincerity, of all things, is one of the moſt important in a goſpel Miniſter. For whatever affected gravity or zeal a man may put on; yet, if he be deſtitute of ſincerity of heart, to anſwer his own ends, he may often corrupt the word of GOD. Such the Apoſtle deems deceivers, who would ſubvert whole houſes, teaching things which they ought not for filthy lucre's ſake. Though many follow them, they are but falſe teachers, who would make merchandiſe of the ſouls of men.

THERE will be falſe teachers, as the Apoſtle tells us, who will bring in damnable hereſies—and many ſhall follow their pernicious ways, by reaſon of whom, the way of truth ſhall be evil ſpoken of. And through covetouſneſs ſhall they with feigned words make merchandize of you; whoſe judgment now of a long time

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lingereth not, and their damnation ſlumbereth not.—But the holy Apoſtles renounced the hidden things of diſhoneſty, and walked not in craftineſs, and did not handle the word of God deceitfully, but by manifeſtation of the truth, commended themſelves to every man's conſcience in the ſight of God. If it be objected, that the Apoſtle Paul tells the Corinthians, that being crafty, he caught them with guile: It may be ſaid in reply: the Apoſtle did not mention this as his own aſſertion, but as an accuſation brought againſt him by his enemies; which he confutes in what follows; as may eaſily be ſeen by comparing the whole paſſage. The Apoſtle, indeed, ſhowed a pleaſing and amiable example of chriſtian condeſcention in leſſer matters, where conſcience was not concerned. And, in things indifferent, became all things to all men, that he might ſave ſome. But he never withheld, gave up, or diſguiſed the truth for any man, but contended earneſtly for the faith once delivered to the ſaints; and did not ſhun to declare the whole counſel of God. Like him, the faithful miniſter of Chriſt ſhould in doctrine ſhow uncorruptneſs, gravity, ſincerity, as of God. They are to treat of him, and of his true character, as he is diſplayed in his word and works. They are to preach as from God. They are to take their doctrines from his word, and to warn every man, and teach every man, concerning the things of God, and the kingdom of his Son; and to make his pure and uncorrupted word the only ſtandard of faith and practice. Such preachers, with great humility and godly fear, will ſtudy not to pleaſe men, but God. They will preach not themſelves, but Chriſt Jeſus the Lord. The inquiry of ſuch a preacher will be, How ſhall I ſtudy? What truths ſhall I deliver? And how ſhall I deliver them, ſo as moſt to glorify God, and do good to the ſouls of men? While a

corrupter of the word, from pride of heart and ſelf-conceit, may inquire, What ſhall I ſay? and how ſhall I ſpeak, that I may be thought learned and wiſe, and gain the applauſes of men; the faithful and wiſe preacher will endeavor to deliver the moſt important truths, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear. He will endeavor as of God, in the ſight of God, to ſpeak in Chriſt. "I know not how it is with others," ſaid a learned divine* in his advice to the Clergy, "but the moſt reverent preacher, who ſpeaks as if he ſaw the face of God, more effects my heart, though with common words, than an irreverent man with the moſt accurate preparations, though he deliver himſelf with ever ſo much ſeeming earneſtneſs. We ſhould ſuppoſe, ſaid he, when we draw near him in holy things, that we ſaw, as it were, the throne of GOD, and the millions of glorious angels attending him, that we may be awed with his Majeſty, leſt we profane his ſervice, or take his name in vain."

WHAT has been ſaid may lead us to reflect upon the miſerable characters of thoſe, who, through ignorance, pride, and arrogance, from baſeneſs of mind, or with a view to exalt themſelves, become corrupters of the word of GOD. What is this better than to tempt the GOD of Heaven, and ſport with the lives of men?—They miſrepreſent the divine character, and darken counſel by words without knowledge. The paths, in which they direct men, are intricate and obſcure; and real danger is in all the way.——Such preachers are troublers of the Church, and perverters of the goſpel of Chriſt. What is this but to bring in another goſpel? And though we, or an Angel from Heaven, preach any other goſpel unto you, than that we have preached, ſays the Apoſtle, let him be accurſed.

WE

* BAXTER,

We may hence learn with what great humility, prayerfulneſs, and ſincerity, the preacher ought to ſtudy the holy ſcriptures, to find out the true mind and will of God therein revealed; and then with all plainneſs and ſerioufneſs, to deliver it to the people. "He is an enemy, who hides the truth; and he is an hypocrite who does this under pretence of revealing it."* Some may deſignedly conceal their ſentiments. But if their ſentiments be juſt, what need is there of this? If the cauſe in which they are engaged be a good one, how can they better promote it than by laying it open fairly, and pleading it honeſtly, and by making it as clearly and fully underſtood as poſſible. They, who undertake to preach the uncorrupted word of truth, have no need of diſguiſe, or to try to conceal what God hath revealed. Preachers of uncorrupted truth ought to be honeſt, and faithful to God, and to thoſe who hear them. They ought to be plain hearted, and plain dealing men; Iſraelites indeed, who deal not in guile and hypocriſy, who walk not in craftineſs, nor handle the word of God deceitfully.

Our ſubject applies with great force to us, my much reſpected fathers and brethren, who are honored with the ſacred office of the goſpel miniſtry. We learn, dear Sirs, how much it concerns us, as ſtewards of the manifold grace of God, to preach that word, which will eventually prove the ſavour of life unto life, or of death unto death to thoſe who hear us, with uncorruptneſs, and great ſincerity, as in the ſight of God. Nothing, perhaps, would keep our minds in a more humble, reverential frame, nor make us more careful to deliver the uncorrupted word of truth, than a ſolemn ſenſe of the omnipreſence of God; and that in his ſight we are to watch for ſouls, as thoſe who muſt give an account.

* Baxter,

count. Were it poſſible for us to have ſuch a view of the inviſible world as John had; could we by an eye of faith ſee the Heavens opened, and behold the eternal God ſitting upon his holy throne, encircled with cherubim and cerephim, and numerous orders of holy angels and glorified ſpirits; could we behold the glorious Lamb of God, who was once dead, but is alive, and lives forevermore, ſtanding at the right hand of God, and ſee him take the book, the revelation of the divine will, from him who ſitteth upon the throne, and handing it to us, hear him ſay, take this, my everlaſting goſpel, and without corrupting it, go ye, and deliver it to men, in my name, as in the ſight of God, who conſtantly ſees you from his holy throne! Could we have ſuch views as theſe, how, oh! how ſhould we ſtudy, how ſhould we pray, and how ſhould we preach the uncorrupted word of God! But, although we have not ſuch immediate views of the divine preſence as theſe, yet, let us remember, the word of God is as much from him, and we are as conſtantly in his preſence, and are as accountable to him, as if ſuch ſcenes were actually, and conſtantly viſible before us. Happy would it be for us, and happy would it be for thoſe who hear us, if we might always entertain a juſt ſenſe of the omnipreſence of God. With conſcious integrity, may we ever be able to adopt the language of the text, and ſay, We are not as many who corrupt the word of God; but as of ſincerity, but as of God in the ſight of God, ſpeak we in Chriſt. Then ſhall we be free from the blood of all men, and ſave ourſelves and thoſe who hear us.

We learn farther, that if the word of God be preached in its purity, they muſt be infinitely to blame, who cavil at the goſpel, and will not receive it as the word of life. May we all duly conſider the eternal conſe-

quences

quences which will inevitably follow. To them, who through hardneſs of heart and unbelief, reject the truth, the word will become a ſavour of death unto death! It will have influence upon them, only to fit them for deſtruction. But to them who believe, and obey the goſpel, the word will become a ſavour of life unto life; and will fit them for glory and happineſs eternal.

WITH a few cuſtomary addreſſes the ſubject will cloſe.

FIRST, to our young Friend and Brother, who, by the united ſuffrages of this church and people, is now ſolemnly to be conſecrated to the ſacred office of the miniſtry, according to Apoſtolic order, by prayer and the laying on of the hands of the Preſbytery.

DEAR SIR,

BY the providence of GOD, you are called early in life into the labors of his vineyard. You are now, though young, to take the overſight of this flock of GOD; to have many ſouls committed to your charge; for whom you are to watch, as one who muſt give an account. You are to take the word as from the mouth of GOD, and to warn them from him. We confidently truſt, you will do it, not as many who corrupt the word of GOD, but as of ſincerity, as of GOD, in the ſight of GOD, you will ſpeak in Chriſt. You are no ſtranger to us. Your character, your manner of life and education, are known unto us from your childhood. We rejoice, dear Sir, in the abilities, both natural and acquired, with which you are endowed. But you will remember, Sir, that neither the profoundeſt learning, nor moſt ſhining abilities, without grace in the heart,

and without ſerious prayer, and much ſtudy and watchfulneſs, will ſecure you againſt the numerous, and increaſing errors, and corruptions of the word of God, with which the preſent period abounds. While all due deference is to be paid to the writings and opinions of learned and pious men, you, I truſt, will make the word, the pure and unadulterated word of God your directory; and the ſole ſtandard of your faith and practice. I could preſcribe to you my creed; and could tell the ideas I have of the great doctrines of chriſtianity; and could ſolemnly exhort you, in the preſence of God and the elect angels, to preach my ſentiments, and to anathematiſe all who do not believe as I do. But where ſhould I go for my authority to do this? Should I act the part of ſuch a dogmatical dictator of your faith, you might juſtly pity my weakneſs, and deſpiſe my arrogance. But, ſurely, you would not follow my direction. But without aſſuming the part of ſuch a vain Pontiff; as, by your requeſt, I am called to be your monitor this day, I may be permitted to adviſe you, with great diligence and devout prayer, to give yourſelf to the ſtudy of the ſacred ſcriptures; and to make them your guide, and to follow no man, nor body of men, any farther than they follow Chriſt. But as a matter of the greateſt concern, on which may depend the eternal life or death of them who hear you, be not as many, who corrupt the word of God. But ſetting at defiance the hidden things of diſhoneſty, not walking in craftineſs, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifeſtation of the truth, commend yourſelf to every man's conſcience in the ſight of God.

The preſent is a period fraught with numerous errors. A melancholy laxneſs in religious ſentiments and morals prevails. Politeneſs and affability, liberal-

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ity of ſentiment and common honeſty, with many, at the preſent day, is all the religion they deſire. But you, Sir, have not ſo learned Chriſt. Under a juſt ſenſe of the important reality of religion, and feeling the influence of it upon your own mind, you will ſet at defiance every mean artifice to exalt yourſelf in the minds of your people; and will as carefully avoid every thing, that may be derogatory to your ſacred office, or that may leſſen the weight and influence of religion in the minds of others. You will never condeſcend to diſſemble, to flatter, or even to ſmile at the leaſt contempt in word or behaviour caſt upon chriſtianity, or any of its ſacred inſtitutions. But in all companies, and on all occaſions, I confidently truſt, you will ſhow to the world, that you believe the truths you preach to others; and reſting your own ſalvation upon them, it will be your fixed reſolution, that let others do as they may, your whole deportment ſhall conform to the precepts and example of our divine Maſter. Then you will ſuffer no man to deſpiſe your youth. But you will enforce the doctrines and duties, which you believe and preach to others, by that moſt forcible of all methods of teaching; viz. by your own example, in word, in converſation, in charity, in ſpirit, in faith, in purity. In this way, you will manifeſt a ſerious concern for the honor of the Redeemer and his religion, and for the ſalvation of your own ſoul and the ſouls of others. Then will you never be aſhamed of the croſs of Chriſt.

We rejoice, dear Sir, that you enter upon the labors of the miniſtry, with ſuch pleaſing and animating proſpects of uſefulneſs. It is the happy lot of but few, to meet with that entire unanimity in the proceedings of a people, and that general and high eſteem, which is profeſſed for you in this place. May their

unanimity

unanimity and eſteem be as laſting as they are great. May no root of bitterneſs ever ſpring up, nor any thing take place among this people, to damp the ardour with which you enter your employment; nor any thing be done or omitted by you, to diſappoint their moſt raiſed expectations, from the intereſting connexion now forming between you. But remember, Sir, we live in a world that is given to change. However bright and ſerene the ſun may riſe, and the morning appear, the day may be overcaſt before the cloſe. However fair and ſerene the morning of your miniſtry may be, ſome clouds may ariſe, and in a meaſure darken and threaten the preſent bright proſpects before you. The nature of your office, and the natural fickleneſs of mankind, may give the moſt prudent and faithful miniſter cauſe to fear this. Without anticipating evil, the ſerious thought, that tranſient clouds may darken the brighteſt proſpects, ſhould keep us humble, prayerful, and watchful againſt the dangers of proſperity; which many times are greater than thoſe of adverſity. But ſhould the preſent ſcene ever be darkened by intervening clouds, a firm truſt in GOD, and faithfulneſs to the Redeemer's cauſe, will ſecure you the preſence and aſſiſtance of him, who hath ſaid, My grace is ſufficient for you. Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world.

ACCEPT, my younger Brother, my moſt cordial and devout wiſhes for your long proſperity and uſefulneſs in the goſpel of Chriſt. May your labours in the Lord be crowned with a joyful harveſt of ſouls, who ſhall be the ſeals of your miniſtry, and crown of your rejoicing in the day of the Lord.

BELOVED Brethren and Friends of this Church and Congregation,

We cannot but recal to mind, on this occaſion, the faithful Miniſters of Chriſt, who have been over the people of God in this place, and have ſpoken unto them the word of life, but are now gone to the ſepulchres of their Fathers; and are gathered unto the congregation of the dead. Some of them were ſuddenly removed from their labours, in the midſt of their days, and their uſefulneſs.* May the paſt diſpenſations of Heaven toward you, be long remembered with ſuitable reflections, and a wiſe improvement. We ſympathize with you, upon the recollection of the dark clouds, which have heretofore been drawn over this people, and the days of your paſt mourning and lamentation! But would now felicitate you, and mingle joy with yours, on the bright proſpect which opens itſelf to view, on

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* *Since this Sermon was delivered, the Rev. Mr.* Abbot *has favored me with minutes for the following note, containing ſome account of the Paſtors of the firſt Church in Haverhill.*

1. *The Rev.* John Ward, *who was born November 5, 1606, came to New-England and ſettled in* 1641, *at a place, which afterwards, ſome where about* 1645—1648, *was incorporated by the name of Haverhill. He preached his laſt Sermon November* 23, 1693, *and died the* 27*th of the December following: Æt.* 88, *about the* 52*d of his miniſtry.*

2. *The Rev.* John Rolfe *was ſettled in* 1694. *He, his wife and one child were killed by the Indians, Auguſt* 29, 1708, *about the* 14*th of his miniſtry.*

3. *The Rev.* Joſhua Gardner *ſucceeded him. The time of his ſettlement, and death are not aſcertained. It is ſuppoſed he was miniſter there about* 5 *years.*

4. *The Rev.* John Brown *was ſettled in* 1719, *and died of a conſumption, December* 2*d*, 1742, *Æt.* 46, *and about the* 23*d of his miniſtry.*

5. *The Rev.* Edward Barnard *was ſettled April* 27, 1743, *and died of a paralytic diſorder, January* 26, 1774, *Æt.* 54, *in the* 31*ſt of his miniſtry.*

6. *The Rev.* John Shaw *was ſettled March* 12, 1777, *and died of an Apoplexy, September* 29, 1794, *Æt.* 48, *and in the* 18*th of his miniſtry.*

7. The Rev. Abiel Abbot was ſettled June 3d. 1795.

this auſpicious day. So ſpeedy a reſettlement of the miniſtry, with ſuch an entire unanimity of the people, with ſo warm an eſteem expreſſed for the candidate, as this day witneſſeth, is rarely to be found. My friends, behold the man of your united choice; remember his youth; and let your kindneſs and tenderneſs toward him be as laſting, as the ſtrength of eſteem and affection you now expreſs toward him. Bear him much upon your minds at the throne of grace. And never, O never forſake the Levite; but let him be with you without fear. Candidly receive from him the plaineſt truths, ſpoken as in the ſight of GOD, in the name of Chriſt. Endeavor to render his work eaſy, and his uſefulneſs great among you. May the Almighty Father, the great Shepherd of Iſrael, take both him and you into his holy protection, and build you up in faith and comfort. And, finally, may the GOD of peace be his and your portion forever.

THIS numerous and reſpectable audience will indulge me a word, by way of cloſe.

WE ſee, with what plainneſs and ſincerity, the miniſters of the everlaſting goſpel are to preach the unadulterated word of GOD; and as of GOD, in the ſight of GOD, to ſpeak to men in the name of Chriſt. Of as much importance it is, that we all attend to it, as to the word of life.

AND let us bear in mind, that it will be a ſavour of life unto life, or, ſolemn thought, of death unto death, to every ſoul who hears it. This ſhould lead us, as we would wiſh for the ſalvation of our own ſouls, ever to treat the goſpel and all its ſacred inſtitutions with great reverence and reſpect. This ſhould lead us duly

to

to regard the goſpel miniſtry, and thankfully to acknowledge the goodneſs of GOD, in the diſpenſations of his word and ordinances to the children of men.—May the holy Spirit of the Lord be poured out upon Miniſters and people. May we all believe in the goſpel of Chriſt, embrace its doctrines, and conform to its precepts, that the bleſſings it promiſes may be ours, both in the life that now is, and in that which is to come.

AND now may the Lord bleſs us, and keep us: The Lord make his face to ſhine upon us, and be gracious unto us: The Lord lift up his countenance upon us, and give us peace. And may the name of the Lord be put upon all the congregations of his people, that he may bleſs them forever.

AMEN.

THE CHARGE,

BY THE

Rev. WILLIAM SYMMES,

OF *ANDOVER.*

TRUE and worthy apprehenſions of the divine character aſſiſt us in forming and improving our ideas of his moral government. *Light* and *love* are eſſential and diſtinguiſhing excellencies of the Father of lights, and God of love. But in the order of our conceptions, a peculiar glory is annexed to his unſearchable wiſdom. This firſt principle of action directs, pervades, and regulates the whole of the divine adminiſtration. We according conceive of *the only wiſe GOD* as acting, not out of mere pleaſure and arbitrary Sovereignty, but as a wiſe and righteous Governor, *all whoſe paths are mercy and truth.* In the means and inſtruments, which he employs to effect his purpoſes, as well as in the more immediate operations of his hands, we behold the marks and ſignatures of a *wiſdom*, that cannot err.

ALL the works of God declare him to be *wiſe in heart*, as well as *mighty in ſtrength.* But of all the admirable effects of divine ſkill and contrivance, the remedial diſpenſation for the recovery of loſt man juſtly claims the pre-eminence. This is emphatically *the wiſdom that is from above.* It is *the manifold wiſdom of GOD*, the admiration of Angels, and the inſtituted means of ſpiritual and eternal life to man. To

To you, Sir, on whom our hands are laid, is this ineſtimable treaſure of wiſdom and knowledge committed. And as you are intruſted with it to *profit withal, firſt* for your own improvement in the ſcience of divine truth, and then for the benefit of others; give me leave, (as your deputed remembrancer on this ſolemn occaſion,) to remind you, that your high office demands a ſerious, punctual, and perſevering attention to the great objects of the chriſtian miniſtry.

The ſacred office, to which you are called, is an office to be deſired, as it is a *good work*, and as it has benign influence on the clerical character. The time and abilities of man can be employed in no buſineſs more arduous, uſeful, and honourable, than that to which you have devoted yourſelf, we truſt, with an upright and ready mind. Your employment, as a chriſtian miniſter, naturally points out its end. It is to edify the body of Chriſt—to preach and *teſtify the goſpel of the grace of GOD*—and to be a worker together with him, that his glory may be great in the Salvation of ſouls from ſin and death. That you may underſtand the ſacred volume in the true ſenſe, and ſucceſsfully explain and apply its contents to others, you will *give yourſelf to reading, meditation and prayer.*

The ſacred ſcriptures are abundantly ſufficient to all the purpoſes of devotion and edification. To be converſant with them is the way to be *apt to teach*, and happily conduct and aſſiſt the devotion of your fellow-worſhippers.

The more your heart is engaged in your work, the more ſolicitous will you be to *declare all the counſel of GOD*,

GOD, keeping back nothing, that is profitable, or will *edify the body of Christ.* Thus will you *hold fast the faithful word, and speak those things that become, sound doctrine,* which has an invariable tendency to meliorate the temper, and influence the behavior of those, who receive it.

You may not expect to be always out of hearing of controversies. But a virtuous solicitude *by manifestation of the truth,* to *commend yourself to every man's conscience in the sight of GOD,* will admit little leisure or inclination to perplex yourself or your hearers with the uprofitable distinctive subtleties of uninspired men: and enable you with more satisfaction of mind, and advantage to them, to teach and inculcate the plain simple doctrinal and practical truths of natural and revealed religion.

Relative to the special ordinances of the gospel, suffice it to say: They have the stamp of divine authority, as means and instruments of conveying spiritual blessings to men. In the administration of them, you will be guided by the distinction which the scriptures make between believers and unbelievers, and their respective offspring. Thus to observe and conform to the original institution of divine ordinances, is the best way to correct errors, and prevent divisions.

Considering the present state of religion, it is to be expected that some will take pleasure in imputing the abuses of the pastoral office to the office itself. You will do well therefore *to watch in all things,* and prepare to *endure hardship, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.* It is not enough *to abstain from all appearance*

of

of evil: the dignity and importance of your office require, that you prescribe to yourself an higher standard of morals, than other christians. Be thou therefore exemplary in *word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.*

If in the duties of your office as Pastor, Guide, and Teacher, you assiduously employ your time and talents; you will be able to maintain a proper authority in the house of your God, without exposing yourself to the charge of tyrannizing *over his heritage*, or *usurping dominion* over the faith of your hearers.

It remains, dear Sir, that you live under the awe of an office, that binds the solemn pastoral charges of God upon you, to make full proof of your ministry.

You will easily supply the defects of this exhortation, by having recourse to St. Paul's epistles to Timothy and Titus. By supporting the character therein exhibited of *a good minister of Jesus Christ*, you will *fulfil your ministry*, according to that interesting and animating description of its intention and design *to save yourself and those that hear you.*

And now, my brother, *we recommend you to GOD, and the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them, that are sanctified.*

THE

RIGHT HAND of FELLOWSHIP,

GIVEN BY THE

Rev. GILES MERRILL,

Miniſter of PLAISTOW *and part of* HAVERHILL.

GOD *is love; and he, who dwelleth in love, dwelleth in* GOD, *and* GOD *in him.* Love is the ſum of excellence in moral beings; it is the baſis and bond of all virtuous union. A divided heart is the ſource of human miſery; diſcord is the bane of ſociety; union is its happineſs and ſecurity. Union, in nature, is the great chain, which holds all the various parts of the vaſt Univerſe in one harmonious ſyſtem. Union, in grace, is the cement, that binds all the different powers and faculties of the heart together, and fixes the whole on their proper objects. Union, in ſociety, is the tendency and affection of all the members, that compoſe it, towards one great common object, the general good. Union, therefore, is the ſource of perſonal and ſocial happineſs, the ſtrength and glory, the honor and felicity of intelligent beings. How pleaſing then, how gratifying muſt it be to benevolent minds, when love and union are exemplified in a chriſtian ſociety? eſpecially in the tranſactions which originate, conduct, and complete the ordination of a goſpel miniſter.

We bleſs God, and we felicitate ourſelves on the auſpicious event of this day.

The council here preſent are in poſſeſſion of the liveliest and moſt affectionate ſenſibilities, on this occaſion; and have deſired me, as their organ, to expreſs them in the Apoſtolic mode of giving the hand. This, dear Sir, I now do, in token that, with the *hand*, you have our *heart*, our *eſteem*, and our *love*; in token of *equality* and *fraternity*; equality in office, and fraternity in affection; in token, that we acknowledge you a miniſter of the goſpel, regularly inducted into office, and our fellow laborer in the kingdom of Chriſt; at the ſame time promiſing, and expecting a reciprocity of advice and aſſiſtance, on all proper occaſions.

And now, dear brother, we *greet you much in the Lord*. Words are wanting to utter the ardor of ſoul, with which we wiſh you the benediction of Jeſus, to whoſe ſpecial ſervice in the goſpel, you are now devoted; and to the prudent, ſerious, and faithful performance of which, you are under the moſt ſolemn engagements. Under the benign influence of the *Sun of Righteouſneſs*, and in the exerciſe of a truly pious and prudent, benevolent and evangelical ſpirit, ſuch as was conſpicuous in your predeceſſors now with God, may you *burn* and *ſhine*, till you ſpend and are ſpent. Having acted your part on the ſtage of public life, in a protracted miniſtry, marked with integrity, tranquility, and ſucceſs, may you receive a *Crown of Glory, that fadeth not away. The Lord Jeſus Chriſt be with your Spirit; grace be with you, Amen.*

Brethren

BRETHREN and Friends of this church and chriſtian ſociety; we offer you our moſt cordial congratulations, on the tranſactions and ſolemnity of this day.

WHEN your late benevolent paſtor was ſuddenly removed by death, ſome of us were called to condole with you, on that occaſion. We wept and made ſupplication together; and we truſt, it is in anſwer to our prayers, that the Repairer of Breaches has brought about the event of this day: We rejoice in the prudence and unanimity, which have marked the ſteps of your conduct, in this re-ſettlement. We entertain a pleaſing hope, that he, who has now devoted himſelf to ſerve you in your beſt intereſts, will prove a ſingular bleſſing to you, and to your children. That it may be ſo, bear him on your hearts inceſſantly at the throne of grace. Let that *brotherly love continue*, which has hitherto been your honor and ſtrength. *We beſeech you, that ye receive not the grace of* GOD *in vain. Have ſalt in yourſelves, and be at peace one with another.*

MAY I be indulged with obſerving, before I cloſe, that the ſolemn exhibitions of this day are pregnant with inſtruction, both to miniſters and the ſeveral claſſes of citizens here preſent. May our *profitting appear to all*; may it be particulrrly manifeſt in the temperate and ſober manner, in which the feſtivities, cloſing the day, ſhall be conducted; that no additional occaſion may be given for the general complaint, that our ordinations are ſeaſons of growing licentiouſneſs.

ABOVE all, may it be the concern of each of us to realize and improve our christian priviledges—to be reconciled to GOD—to be one with Christ—to believe and obey the gospel, and to cultivate all the friendly and social affections, till, through grace, we shall be prepared to join the *general assembly*, and enjoy that felicity, which consists in being made PERFECT IN ONE.

FINIS.